

dedicating the month of May in San Francisco as Asian Pacific Heritage month.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we have come full circle as a nation in our attitudes toward Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. This vibrant part of our community offers an array of perspectives that are firmly woven into the fabric of America, and I am extremely proud to serve as a representative of the community. I invite my colleagues of all backgrounds to join me in observing this wonderful month and recognizing the contributions that they have made in fighting for liberty and freedom for this great nation.

HEALTH INSURANCE CRISIS

SPEECH OF

HON. JAMES P. McGOVERN

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 3, 2005

Mr. McGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take time today to recognize "Cover the Uninsured Week," a project of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation designed to raise awareness of the issue of access to health care.

It may be hard to believe, but more than a decade has passed since the Clinton Administration's health care plan died in Congress. In survey after survey, Americans consistently rate access to health insurance as one of their top concerns. But unfortunately, our nation's political leaders have failed to lead on this critical issue.

The facts reveal a startling truth—as a Nation, we are facing a crisis of the uninsured. In just the last four years, the number of uninsured Americans has ballooned to 45 million, an increase of more than 5 million people. If the millions that go without health insurance for some period during the year are included, the number of uninsured dramatically increases to more than 85 million people.

To dispel one myth: This rise in the number of uninsured is not the result of people deciding not to work. Rather, an overwhelming majority of the uninsured—80 percent—are working families, many employed by businesses that have become less able to provide health coverage for their employees.

And if things weren't bad enough, the Administration has proposed broad cuts to Medicaid, essentially gutting the healthcare system of last resort for poor Americans, by at least \$10 billion. In these worsening times, how can we justify pulling the rug out from underneath our community's most vulnerable?

In my home state of Massachusetts, we have been fortunate; we are among those states with the lowest percentage of uninsured. But, even there we have a lot more work to do. According to a recent Urban Institute report, there are currently 532,000 uninsured people in Massachusetts, and most of the health care available to these people is provided by local hospitals.

And like many other states, since 2000, Massachusetts workers have seen their health premiums rise three times faster than their wages. If these trends continue, fewer individuals and families will be able to afford to pay for coverage, and fewer small businesses will be able to provide this vital benefit to employees.

As we all know, we often tend to ignore that, which does not directly affect us, but we

can no longer afford to do so; there are clear consequences to all of us for ignoring the plight of the uninsured. According to a recent Institute of Medicine report, the United States loses \$65–\$130 billion each year as a result of the poor health and early deaths of uninsured adults. Should things continue to worsen, we will all be forced to bare the financial burden of the uninsured.

But this problem extends beyond the dollars and cents. As citizens, we have a moral responsibility to our communities, and we cannot stand by in good conscience as millions are denied access to basic health care.

So, as we take this time to recognize "Cover the Uninsured Week," I hope that my colleagues will join me in raising awareness about the reality facing the millions of uninsured. We must not allow this issue to remain on the back burner of the national political debate. Health care is a right, not a privilege, and all of us must work to extend that right to every single American.

HONORING THE MEMORY OF MR.
R.B. "DICKIE" WILLIAMS, III

HON. JO BONNER

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 5, 2005

Mr. BONNER. Mr. Speaker, recently south Alabama lost one of its most colorful personalities, and I lost a dear friend, R.B. "Dickie" Williams, III, and I rise today to honor him and pay tribute to his memory.

A native of Mobile, Alabama, "Dickie" was raised on the Williams Plantation in Finchburg, Alabama. After graduating from Monroeville High School and attending Auburn University, he graduated in 1958 with a B.S. degree in pharmacy from Howard College (since renamed Samford University). In 1961, "Dickie" moved to Selma, Alabama, and worked for three years on the staff of Swift Drug Company. In 1964, he moved one last time to Monroeville, where he opened Williams Drug Store.

For nearly 40 years, Williams Drug Store was one of the foundations of the businesses found on Monroeville's town square and provided—in addition to one of the best and most efficient pharmacies anywhere in the area—a gathering place for members of the community who would come together for fresh coffee and good conversation. In addition, the store became an unofficial repository of decades of Monroe County history, and during the latter part of his life "Dickie" was known as Monroe County's "unofficial historian." During his life, he shared his vast knowledge of county history and personal recollections of life in Monroe County in a column for the town's newspaper, the Monroe Journal, and in a series of four books.

Perhaps most importantly, however, "Dickie" was deeply concerned for the personal well-being of his fellow Monroe Countians and for the preservation of his county's and his State's natural and historic sites. During the course of his life, he established the Monroe County Conservation Club and was instrumental in the creation of the Monroe County State Fishing Lake. Additionally, he was a past president of the Alabama Wildlife Federation and for 21 years was an

elected Alabama delegate to the National Wildlife Federation. "Dickie" was also instrumental in helping to save the Old Monroe County Courthouse from demolition and was one of the founders of the Monroe County Heritage Museum.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in remembering a devoted citizen and longtime advocate for Monroe County, Alabama. "Dickie" will be deeply missed by his family—his wife, Nancy Beeland Williams, his brothers, Charles Robbins Williams and John Bonner Williams, his daughter, Elizabeth Williams Olsey, his son, Richard Russell Williams, his stepsons, Dr. David Stallworth and Jeff Stallworth, his stepdaughter, Nancy Stallworth Weiss, and his 9 grandchildren—as well as the many friends he leaves behind. Our thoughts and prayers are with them all at this difficult time.

FAIR TAXES, FAIR BENEFITS,
FAIR SOCIAL SECURITY FOR THE
WOMEN OF OUR NATION!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 5, 2005

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to urge support for three bills that I have introduced to provide financial relief to women in our Nation. Both men and women will receive assistance from this legislation, but because women are often with less financial resources, they will particularly benefit.

My first bill, H.R. 2127, the "Fair Taxes for Seniors Act", will provide a one-time increase in the capital gains tax exemption on the sale of a home for citizens who are 50 years of age or older. Passing this bill will give many seniors the additional money they need for nursing home care, medical costs, and other retirement expenses.

The current capital gains tax exemption works well for younger people who often move from job to job, selling their homes. The current exemption works well for people who live in areas where housing prices are below average. But it is not working for individuals who have lived in one home for 20 to 50 years and have a capital gain that is much larger than the present exemption. In other words, it is not working for seniors who live in areas with higher housing prices, such as San Diego, California in my Congressional District.

My bill doubles the current exemption by providing a one-time increase to \$500,000 for a single person and \$1 million for a couple that can be excluded from the sale of a principal residence for taxpayers who have reached the age of 50. Because they will be able to keep more, an added benefit is that family members and perhaps the government will be relieved of the burden of caring for these individuals as they grow older.

My second bill is H.R. 2126, the "Social Security Survivors Fairness Act", legislation to provide Social Security widows' and widowers' benefits to people under the age of 60. Many of these survivors are women, women who have spent their life working in the home, raising their children, and supporting their husbands. They currently are allowed to receive Social Security widows' benefits, but to qualify they must be 60 years old.

It is very difficult for many to find a job at their age if they have never worked outside their homes. Women in their late 50s who are dependent on their husbands' Social Security are left with no means of support if their spouses die.

My bill would amend the Social Security Act to reduce from 60 to 55 the age at which an individual who is otherwise eligible may be paid widows' or widowers' insurance benefits.

Finally, I have introduced H.R. 2125, the "Continued Benefits for Injured Military Spouses Act". Under current law, enacted in 1982, former spouses of military members or retirees are eligible for military medical benefits and exchange and commissary privileges if the military member had performed at least 20 years of military service, had been married for at least 20 years to one spouse, and 20 years of marriage and service were overlapping. This is known as the 20/20/20 restriction. Further legislation was enacted 2 years later to include additional former spouses under a 20/20/15 restriction.

While this law recognizes the contribution and sacrifice of many military spouses who later divorced, there is a group who are completely left out through no fault of their own. Spouses who must leave a marriage through divorce due to documented abuse are often left with none of these benefits. Domestic violence and physical or sexual endangerment to the spouse or the children, proven by medical or counseling records, should be taken into account. Divorced because of this situation, the injured spouse should continue to receive benefits.

H.R. 2125 will change the law to 20/20/10 only for these special circumstances, meaning that the military member would have been married for at least 20 years to one spouse, would have performed at least 20 years of military service, with 10 years of service and marriage overlapping. This change would allow an abused spouse to escape from a potentially dangerous marriage and still keep benefits.

Most of our military members are honorable and good people. But, in the few cases where spousal or child abuse is involved, we must protect the families. I invite my colleagues to join me in support of military spouses who have found themselves in dangerous marriages, in support of fairer taxes for senior citizens, and in support of widows' benefits for surviving spouses who are 55 and older.

HONORING SAM RAMPELLO

HON. JIM DAVIS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 5, 2005

Mr. DAVIS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise in honor of Sam Rampello, a tireless advocate for Hillsborough County, Florida's public schools. Sam's passing this weekend silences a passionate voice for our young people.

A Tampa native and graduate of Jesuit High School and the University of Tampa, Sam spent his career working to improve our local schools. He started by teaching history at Plant High School, and then went on to serve as a history professor at the University of Tampa. But it wasn't long before he came back to the public school system, working as

dean of boys at Leto High School, then as assistant principal at Jefferson High School.

In 1972, Sam worked as director of Hillsborough Community College's temporary airport campus and a year later joined the Hillsborough County planning commission. In 1976, Gov. Reubin Askew appointed Sam to the Hillsborough County School board, where he served for nearly 18 years.

Humble by nature, Sam's focus was always on the best interests of his students and his persistent goal was to help make our schools the best they can be. His steadfast faith allowed Sam to see the potential in everyone—particularly our students and those who help them succeed.

Last year, in honor of all his work, a school was named in Sam's honor. When the Sam Rampello Downtown Partnership School opens next year, it will serve as a living testament to Sam's dedication to Hillsborough County Schools.

On behalf of the entire Tampa Bay community, I would like to thank Sam for all of his good deeds and extend my deepest sympathies to his family.

IN HONOR OF CURTIS HIGH SCHOOL UPON ITS RECEIPT OF THE COLLEGE BOARD'S 2005 INSPIRATION AWARD

HON. VITO FOSSELLA

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 5, 2005

Mr. FOSSELLA. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to recognize today the great achievements of a high school in my hometown of Staten Island: Curtis High School (CHS). This important educational institution has just been given a \$25,000 check from the College Board to accompany the school's receipt of the 2005 Inspiration Award. The Board levies this honor annually on only 3 schools that help students achieve equitable access to higher education despite social, economic, and cultural challenges. A focus on attendance led to CHS' receipt of the award this year. The school's pioneering programs have led to 90 percent attendance rate and an 88 percent rate of graduation. Such a feat is truly amazing considering the schools' circumstances.

CHS is a 100-year-old Gothic-style building, embellished with gargoyles and ornate stone archways. The school has an active alumni association, and many of its teachers are graduates, but CHS has changed dramatically since the days when it served a small, homogeneous middle-class community.

Today, Curtis High School functions at 160 percent of capacity. Forty-six percent of its students are documented at or below the federal poverty level, and more than half of its students receive free or reduced-price lunches. Among its racially diverse population of more than 2,600 students, 40 percent are white, 33 percent are black, and 20 percent are Hispanic. The school also serves children who are recent immigrants from Latin America, West Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia.

Curtis High School credits its success to 10 small learning communities called "houses." Every freshman who enters CHS chooses among the themed tracks, which include such varied subjects as the performing arts, Junior

ROTC, business and computer science, nursing, and journalism. Each house has unique electives that develop the student's particular talents and interests—be it dance, computer graphic design, or law—while maintaining a college-preparatory curriculum for all students.

The school also offers afternoon and weekend tutoring programs, active college counseling, and a mentoring program that targets recent immigrants and students with little parental guidance. The Career Connections program, a partnership among CHS, local businesses, and other community-based organizations, helps students to upgrade their résumés by finding paid internships and part-time employment opportunities. Principal Curtis has also introduced programs for parents, such as "Parents As Art Partners," which offers a free photography class, to create more parent involvement at the school.

These innovative initiatives and the school's commitment to its 3 foundations of success, "Attendance, Attitude and Achievement," have allowed literally thousands of children to gain a high school diploma in the face of tremendous odds. In doing so, such efforts have put these children on the path to a better life, free from the shackles of poverty. I am honored to recognize this fine institution and hope its efforts serve as a model for schools throughout the country. The CHS example shows there is no limit to human ingenuity and that through creativity, commitment and perseverance, we can provide a better life for generations to come.

THE ACT TO PROVIDE MEMORIAL MARKERS FOR THOSE WHO DIED WHILE SERVING OVERSEAS

HON. JAMES R. LANGEVIN

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 5, 2005

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to introduce a bill that will help families memorialize those who died in service to our country and are buried in cemeteries overseas. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, those servicemembers whose remains are classified as "unavailable for burial" are eligible for government-provided memorial markers or headstones. While this classification includes those whose remains have not been recovered or who were buried at sea, there is one glaring exception to this definition—those who died fighting for freedom abroad and were laid to rest there.

The United States currently has 24 permanent overseas burial grounds that are the final resting place for nearly 125,000 of our bravest men and women who died serving our country. These sites are the responsibility of the American Battle Monuments Commission and are a wonderful tribute to those buried there. However, the Department of Veterans Affairs maintains that because these graves can be visited, there is no need to provide families at home with a memorial marker for their deceased loved ones.

We should not deny these families the ability to obtain memorial markers when we already do it for so many others. To correct this, my legislation will add overseas burials to the VA's "unavailable for burial" classification and finally let these men and women be memorialized by their families here at home.